The Yeti—some of the Evidence

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The author has been studying the evidence for both the yeti, the 'abominable snowman' of the Himalayas, and the sasquatch of British Columbia for many years and has written two books on the subject. Are they fact or myth? She suggests that the evidence so far collected, including Russian references hitherto little known in the west, justifies further research to find out.

The yeti is described in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as a myth. But the controversy and contradictions continue.

The most serious challenges to the myth theory are two photographs, one by Eric Shipton of a very large manlike footprint in the snow, taken in 1951 on the Menlung Glacier (reproduced in *Oryx*, May 1972), and the second of mysterious tracks in snow taken by Don Whillans on the 1970 Annapurna Expedition. Whillans, some hours after taking his photograph, sighted a dark hair-covered bipedal creature scraping the snow on the slope beyond his hut, apparently looking for food. He watched it for a long time, but it was too dark for photography and he feared that flash would frighten the creature away. Someone in Nepal later told him that the place where he saw it was sometimes called the valley of the great ape.

Some years ago, shortly after the end of the British raj, tribesmen in Northern India confronted and killed an alleged abominable snowman who they said had captured one of their women. Asked why they did not bring back the body, they told Mira Behn (Madeleine Slade) to whom they were responsible as herdsmen—she was in the Garwhal managing a cattle improvement project for the Indian Government—that they feared they might have been charged with murder. To them the alleged myth of the High Himalaya was human.

In 1925, A. M. Tombazi, in charge of a forestry project in Sikkim, was called by his Sherpas to come and look at 'a yeti' a few yards down the mountain slope, where in the bright glare of the early morning sunlight, a dark, hair-covered shape, bipedal and not an ape, was foraging about for rhododendron shoots. Tombazi dismissed the Sherpas's stories, and his own sighting apparently, as 'delicious fairy tales' despite the evidence of his own eyes. Probably the only European to obtain a daylight glimpse of the yeti, Tombazi must have been a most unwilling witness.

More than a century ago, Colonel Przewalski, a compulsive explorer and researcher, brought back from his travels in wilder Russia and Mongolia reports of the 'almas', human-like animals, or animal-like humans, the Slavonic variety of the Himalayan yeti, of which the Russians at that time knew nothing. Nobody wanted to believe Przewalski, who was anxious for further scientific investigation. His discoveries were hushed up, and hidden in archives until more recent Russian authorities uncovered them and sponsored some investigations in the 1950s. But this did not last long and official interest died.

Sponsored research and the study of alleged sightings in the Pamir mountains was now banned. Official cooperation apparently ceased, and a Dr Pronin, working there with a team on a hydrological scheme, was subjected to some ridicule when he reported having seen a hair-covered creature high up a sheer unclimbable rock-face.

However, Professor Boris Porshnev, a noted Russian historian, was one of the dedicated searchers for the truth about the snowman. He spent a lifetime collecting evidence and histories about the mysterious creatures in the Caucasus Mountains, Azerbaijan, other regions of the USSR and Mongolia. His documentation contained accounts of his own travels of investigation, and evidence obtained from informants. He died in 1972, and his information and that of a colleague, Professor Rinchen, of Mongolia, have been passed on to other researchers.

In the 1960s, Professor Jeanne Kofman, a Porshnev disciple, began field work in the Caucasus Mountains, and reported the discovery of food hoards cached by the almas in dense uncultivated terrain surrounding the isolated orchards and dairy holdings. These small primitive farming and fruit-growing communities provided Jeanne Kofman and her team with reports of occasional glimpses of unclassified wild creatures of several types. Heavy body-fur or hair seems general, but with variations in colour and size. Examination of fruit half-bitten by a half-glimpsed young creature, a female, revealed a much larger than human jaw, and longer, stronger teeth. The Kofman plan was to establish confidence, and finally study one of the creatures at close quarters. Illness interrupted her work, but in August this year Dmitri Bayanov, Porshnev's successor, told me that she was back in Caucasus with an extra assistant. A fuller account of this Russian material can be found in my book *The Yeti.*

One controversial question is whether there is justification for considering the Russian snowman to be similar to the Himalayan species, and to have affinity also with British Columbia's sasquatch, and Northern California's bigfoot.

John Green and Rene Dahinden, both of British Columbia, have spent years and their own resources in trying to elucidate the sasquatch or bigfoot question. Green's publications on the British Columbian sasquatch stories, while containing some of his doubts about the reliability of some of his informants, make convincing reading. His cautious approach to the subject, both in conversation and in the use of his evidence from interviews with local people, is impressive. He has collected facts from loggers, prospectors, road workers, and hunters—a floating and small population in those thinly populated mountain and forest territories.

Information has come also from fishermen working the desolate and deeply indented Pacific coast, with myriads of creeks, islets, and precipitous cliffs in fjord-like inlets. Sightings, generally of a very dark, half-human, half ape-like figure, and footprints have been reported from various points. Ruby Creek, Bela Coola, and several other almost uninhabited parts of the country are mentioned repeatedly. At times the sasquatches were observed from a distance looking for food in pools along the shore; sometimes they were seen

to swim from mainland to islets, and back again. Sightings and tracks have occurred intermittently down the years at Kamloops. Encounters are reported near isolated cabins used occasionally by trappers and others, and also by the few more permanent workers in timber, trapping or small farming. Occasionally a sasquatch is reported to have chased someone briefly or even thrown stones.

The footprints and sightings cover several decades down to the 1970s, and to the Canadian reports can be added the Californian track discoveries, culminating in the controversial film of a supposed female sasquatch taken by the late Roger Patterson at Bluff Creek in 1967. The Californian bigfoot equates with the Canadian sasquatch in many respects. It is often asked why these men never shoot at a sasquatch, and try to bring back a body and bones for analysis. I think the answer is that, like the Indian villagers to whom Mira Behn put this question, they are afraid to shoot because of the strikingly human appearance of the hairy ones. Mira Behn has told how on showing a picture paper to a tribesman and asking him which of the photographs looked at all like the snowman of his mountains, he unerringly pointed to the picture of a very ugly financial tycoon!

The yeti-snowman-sasquatch-almas problem will only be solved if all knowledge and information is pooled and ways and means decided internationally for exploring the relevant places, quietly, simply and without too much modern equipment.

Reference

TCHERNINE, O. 1961 The Snowman and Company, London.
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Planning for a Regional Park System

A survey is being made of parks and reserves in Central American countries—Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama—in response to the 1972 National Parks' Conference recommendation that there should be a regional system of parks and protected areas in the Central American isthmus. A grant of $50,000 from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund has enabled IUCN to appoint an ecologist and park planner, Howard Prowse, as consultant for the survey and to prepare plans which will co-ordinate reserves and rural development. UNEP, FAO, UNESCO and WWF are all supporting the project.

Hood Island Tortoise

There is new hope for the Hood Island tortoise, one of the nearly extinct races of Galapagos tortoise. The total wild population is estimated at 15, of which 12 were captured and taken to the tortoise station run by the Ecuadorian National Parks at the Charles Darwin Research Station on Santa Cruz Island. Only one of these was a male, but he has fathered 42 young. Now another male tortoise has been found, as the CDRS Hon. Secretary says, to relieve 'the harem conditions'.

Wildlife '74–6 is a useful small illustrated reference guide to 90 British zoos, wildlife parks, etc. (Interzoo Publications, Burnham, Bucks, 45p.)